FROM THE BOOKSHELF #135 APRIL 6, 1976
DAN NOBLE

"THE EDEN EXPRESS" BY MARK VONNEGUT

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES ....FROM THE BOOKSHELF... A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CURRENTLY READING. TODAY, DAN NOBLE'S REPORT ON "THE EDEN EXPRESS: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF SCHIZOPHRENIA" BY MARK VONNEGUT, PUBLISHED BY PRAEGER. HERE NOW IS BOOK EDITOR ---------.

EDITOR: THE AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION DEFINES SCHIZOPHRENIA AS "A GROUP OF DISORDERS MANIFESTED BY CHARACTERISTIC DISTURBANCES OF THINKING, MOOD AND BEHAVIOR." MARK VONNEGUT'S BOOK IS MORE THAN JUST A DISCUSSION OF THIS SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS. IT IS ALSO THE STORY OF A HUMAN BEING WHO CAME BACK FROM THE DEPTHS. AND IT IS AN ACCOUNT OF A YOUNG AMERICAN OF THE HIPPIE ERA WHO SHARED WITH SO MANY OF THE YOUTH OF HIS DAY GHE GENERAL DISSATISFACTION WITH THE VIEWS AND PRESSURES OF THOSE IN AUTHORITY. BUT IN THIS RESPECT MARK VONNEGUT WAS VERY MUCH LIKE HIS FATHER, THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN SATIRICAL WRITER, KURT VONNEGUT, WHOSE NOVELS WERE EXTREMELY POPULAR WITH STUDENTS BECAUSE THEY SO SHARPLY ATTACKED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES.

NOT SURPRISINGLY MARK VONNEGUT FELT OVERSHADOWED BY HIS FAMOUS FATHER. TO HIS FRIENDS, HE WAS MORE APT

EDITOR: (CONT'D) TO BE LOOKED ON AS THE SON OF A POPULAR COUNTER-CULTURE AUTHOR THAN AS A PERSON IN HIS OWN RIGHT.

MARK'S REACTION WAS TO JOIN A GROUP OF FRIENDS AND HEAD FOR THE WILDS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. THERE, THEY SET UP A COMMUNE. HE WRITES:

VOICE: "I WANTED TO BE A GOOD HIPPIE. FOR ME AND LOTS OF OTHER PEOPLE, A GOOD HIPPIE WAS SOMETHING VERY WORTH BEING, IF NOT THE ONLY THING WORTH BEING."

EDITOR: THE HIPPIE LIFE, TO MARK VONNEGUT AND HIS FRIENDS, MEANT HARD WORK IN THE FIELDS, AWAY FROM THE LUXURIES OF URBAN LIFE. IT MEANT EATING A BASIC, GENERALLY VEGETARIAN DIET. IT ALSO INVOLVED OCCASIONALLY TAKING DRUGS. MARK LIVED IN THE COMMUNE FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS. HE RECALLS:

VOICE: "SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, I STARTED FALLING APART. MY ELEVATION STOPPED WORKING. MY CAPACITY FOR POLITENESS AND SOCIAL GRACE DETERIORATED."

EDITOR: HIS CONVINCING DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS OF LOSING CONTACT WITH REALITY TO SAY THE LEAST, SURPRISING. HE WRITES:

VOICE: "MOST PEOPLE ASSUME IT MUST BE VERY PAINFUL FOR ME TO REMEMBER BEING CRAZY. IT'S NOT TRUE. THE FACT IS, MY MEMORIES OF BEING CRAZY GIVE ME AN ALMOST SENSUAL GLEE. THE CRAZIER I WAS, THE MORE FUN REMEMBERING IT IS."

EDITOR: HERE IS MARK' VONNEGUT'S DESCRIPTION OF SOME OF THE EARLY SYMPTOMS OF HIS ILLNESS:

VOICE: "FROM OUT OF NOWHERE CAME AN INCREDIBLY WRINKLED, IRRIDESCENT FACT. STARTING AS A SMALL POINT INFINITELY DISTANT, IT RUSHED FORWARD, BECOMING INFINITELY HUGE. I COULD SEE NOTHING ELSE. MY HEART STOPPED. THE MOMENT STRETCHED FOREVER. I TRIED TO MAKE THE FACE GO AWAY BUT IT MOCKED ME."

EDITOR: IN FEBRUARY, 1971, MARK WAS ADMITTED TO A MENTAL HOSPITAL. HE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS FATHER AND A CLOSE FRIEND. THE DECISION TO COMMIT HIM WAS A DIFFICULT ONE. IN RECENT YEARS, MANY EXPERTS HAVE ATTACKED THE TRADITIONAL DEFINITION OF MENTAL ILLNESS. CLAIMS HAVE BEEN MADE THAT A MENTALLY SICK PERSON IS SIMPLY TRYING TO ADAPT TO A SICK SOCIETY. MARK VONNEGUT ONCE BELIEVED THIS. BUT THROUGH HIS OWN EXPERIENCE, HE CAME TO A DIFFERENT CONCLUSION:

VOICE: "MY GOING NUTS WITHOUT A FASCIST WITHIN FIFTEEN MILES TO BLAME MADE EVERYONE WANT TO JUST SIT BACK AND DIGEST THINGS A BIT. THAT MY INSANITY WAS A LOGICAL EXTENSION OF LOTS OF THINGS WE BELIEVED IN WAS A HARD THING TO SWALLOW...THERE WAS A LOT THAT WASN'T AS SIMPLE AS IT HAD ONCE SEEMED."

EDITOR: MARK CAME UNDER THE CARE OF PSYCHIATRISTS WHO TOLD HIM HE HAD A GENETIC PREDISPOSITION TO SCHIZOPHRENIA. THE THERAPY THEY INITIATED HELPED, AS HE PUT IT, "TO RESTORE NORMAL BRAIN CHEMISTRY WITH HIGH DOSES OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS" AND CERTAIN DIETARY REQUIREMENTS. IN MARK'S CASE, THE TREATMENT SEEMS TO HAVE WORKED, ALTHOUGH MARK HIMSELF IS NOT SURE A RELAPSE WILL NOT OCCUR. SINCE HIS RECOVERY, MARK HAS LEFT THE COMMUNE AND WHEN LAST HEARD FROM, HE WAS A MEDICAL STUDENT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A REPORT ON THE EDEN EXPRESS: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF SCHIZOPHRENIA" BY MARK VONNEGUT. JOIN US AGAIN NEXT WEEK (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER SELECTION FROM THE BOOKSHELF. THIS IS ----------.

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WJL/CAK